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AUTHOR Vanasin, Pongsri
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on undergraduate geographic education in Thailand. A questionnaire was sent to geography faculty of universities offering a major in geography. Ten universities having a total of 80 geography lecturers responded. Eleven percent of the faculty have doctorates, 66 percent master's and 21 percent bachelor's degrees. Sources of their degrees varied. Seven of the nine geographers having PhD's graduated from institutions in the United States. The other two PhD's graduated from universities in Germany and France. Of those with master's degrees, 26 of the faculty received degrees from U.S. universities; 20 from colleges in Thailand; and the remainder in England, Pakistan, Australia, Canada, and Israel. Of the 17 faculty with a BA degree, one is from Australia, another from the United States, and 15 are from Thailand. Major areas of faculty interest include general geography, cartography, urban studies, and the teaching of geography. One hundred forty credits are required by each university for graduation. The geography programs at the various universities are described. With regard to departmental emphasis, physical geography receives less emphasis in the total geography curriculum than regional geography, socioeconomic geography, and maps and techniques. (Author/RM)

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GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION IN THAILAND

by
Pongsri Vanasin

The focus of this paper is on undergraduate geographic education in Thailand. Universities offering a major in geography include Kasetsart, Chulalongkorn, Chiengmai, Ramkhumhaeng, Silapkorn, Songklanakarinth, and Srinakarinthviroth. Srinakarinthviroth University at Songkhla in penisula Thailand currently offers a minor in geography for education majors, but a major in geography is a good possibility for the next academic year. Data obtained from the geography faculty of these universities by questionanire includes (1) the number of geography teachers, (2) their educational background, (3) areas of interest, (4) a description of the geography programs, (5) compulsory courses in major programs (6) characteristics of geography minors, and (7) the number of geography courses taught.

A. The academic background of geographers teaching undergraduate courses are:

1. Number of faculty and their academic degrees:

The 1980 data were reported from ten universities having a total of 80 geography lecturers -- as shown in Fig. 1. Chiengmai has the largest faculty with 16 lecturers. This is 20 percent of the geography faculty of the universities included in the survey. Srinakarinthviroth is second ranked with 14 faculty members. Ramkhumhaeng has the third largest faculty followed by Silpakorn and Chulalongkorn. These five universities have two-thirds of the geography faculty of all universities included in the survey. Eleven percent

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of the faculty have doctorate, 66 percent master's, and 21 percent bachelor's degrees.

2. Source of Degrees:

Seven of the nine geographers having PhD's graduated from institutions in the United States. Of the remaining two, one graduated from a university in Giensen, Germany, and the other from a university in Bordeaux, France.

Twenty-six of the faculty members with master's degrees obtained them in the United States. Twenty obtained their master's degrees in Thailand, and two graduated from universities in England. Two others obtained their degrees in Pakistan, while Australia, Canada, and Israel produced one each.

Out of the 17 faculty members with a BA. degree, one is from Australia, another from the United States, and the remaining 15 are from Thailand.

3. Areas of Faculty Interest: (Fig. 2)

Fifteen of the 80 faculty members expressed in interest in general geography. Cartography, urban studies, and the teaching of geography were listed as major areas of interest by 8 faculty members each. Seven listed regional geography as their major interest. Four each listed political, cultural, physical, and techniques as areas of

interest, while three each gave population geography and remote sensing. The remaining 17 geographers indicated several other areas of interest including economics geography, agricultural geography, climatology, natural resources, environmental studies, and the geography of settlement. Two lecturers failed to indicate an area of interest. The 16 members of the geography department at Chiengmai University listed 9 areas of interest. The geographers at Ramkhamhaeng had the same number of areas of interest for 11 faculty members. Chulalongkorn had 7 areas of interest and a faculty of 8. The geography faculty at Silpakorn had 6 areas of interest indentified for its 9 members.

B. Geography Programs:

1. Curricula

Data were obtained on the geography curricula of Kasetsart, Chulalongkorn, Chiengmai, Ramkhamhaeng, Silpakorn Songkhlanakharinth, and Srinakarinthviroth universities. One hundred-forty credits are required by each of these universities for graduation. The program at each university differs in detail, but may be divided into 3 sections:

a. basic requirements;
b. compulsory requirements for a major and electives; and
c. requirements for minors and free elective courses.

Three universities require geography courses as a part of the basic course curriculum. The courses required include conservation of natural resources in all three institutions, and the geography of Thailand in two universities. The introduction of cultural geography is required at one university and environmental geography at another. Physical geography, maps, and map reading are required at the remaining university. Degrees offered to geography majors include bachelor of liberal arts in two universities, an bachelor of arts in two others. Two institutions granted bachelor of sicence degrees, and one granted both the bachelor of sicence and bachelor of arts degrees depending upon whether the program emphasizes mapping or socioeconomic geography.

Characteristics of the programs are shown in Fig. 3. An average of approximately 140 semester hours is required for the completion of the bachelors or other degrees. Compulsory geography course average 23 semester hours, but there is a considerable range between the universities. The compulsory geography courses at Chulalongkorn encompass only 5 percent of the total required hours, while over 30 percent of the course load consists of required geography courses at Ramkamhaeng. Geography electives average 16 percent of the course load. Chulalongkorn and Songkhlanakharinth permit considerably more geography electives than the other universities, while Srinakarintharaviroth permits no electives with the exception of university

minors have both required and elective courses. Required courses for minors average about 14 semester hours, and electives for minors average about 10 semester hours. Four of the universities permit students to select courses for minors without any restriction. The other three specific course from which the students must select to fulfill the requirements for a minor.

2. Departmental Emphasis:

Geography courses at each university were examined to determine departmental emphasis. Course offerings were assigned to four groups:

a. Physical geography,
b. Regional geography,
c. Socioeconomic geography, and
d. Maps and Techniques.

Credit given for courses varied from 1 to 6. Only Ramkhamhaeng assigned 3 semester hours credit to each course. The universities were compared by ranking them according to the percentage of courses offered in each of the groups, and according to the percentage of credit hours included by each group. Comments on the number of course offered will also be provided. *(University rank in Physical Geography by Number of Courses and by Credit Hours.)*

The universities in first and second place both offer 12 courses in physical geography and differ by only 1 credit. By contrast, Chulalongkorn offers

four courses for a total of 11 credit hours in physical geography. *(Fig. 3 -- University rank in Regional Geography by Number of Courses and by Credit Hours.)*

Although the College for Teachers is ranked first in this category only 4 regional courses are offered, and these represent 44 percent of the geography courses taught at that institution. By contrasts, the university ranked second offers 13 regional courses representing 34 percent of their courses. The average number of regional courses taught is 9 with a range from 4 to 13, and a percentile range of 20 to 44. *(Fig. 3 -- University rank in Socioeconomic Geography by Number of Course and by Credit Hours.)*

The universities in the first three ranks offer 13, 16, and 15 courses respectively. The average number of socioeconomic courses offered is 10 with a range from 2 to 16. *(Fig. 3 -- University rank in Maps and Techniques by Number of Courses and Credit Hours.)*

Courses included are map reading, map interpretation, cartography, and quantitative methods. Almost one-third of the courses taught at the top three institutions fall into this category. Nine is the average number taught, and the range is from 1 to 14.

In summary, physical geography receives less emphasis in the total geography curriculum than other sub-fields. The number of physical geography courses per department average 7.5, while regional and socioeconomic geography, and maps and techniques average 9, 10, and 9 respectively.

Most developments in geography have taken place during the last decade. Course offerings have increased along with breadth of faculty background areas of interest and expertise. Departmental emphasis tend to logically be an expression of faculty interest. Although emphasis varies from university to university, most universities offer students a range of choices in course work that takes in all four of the areas discussed. Departments attempt to structure their curricula to meet the demand of the market place, and to provide a high quality education for their students.

Pongsri Vanasin

Department of Geography
Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand

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FIGURE I. NUMBER OF FACULTY MEMBER

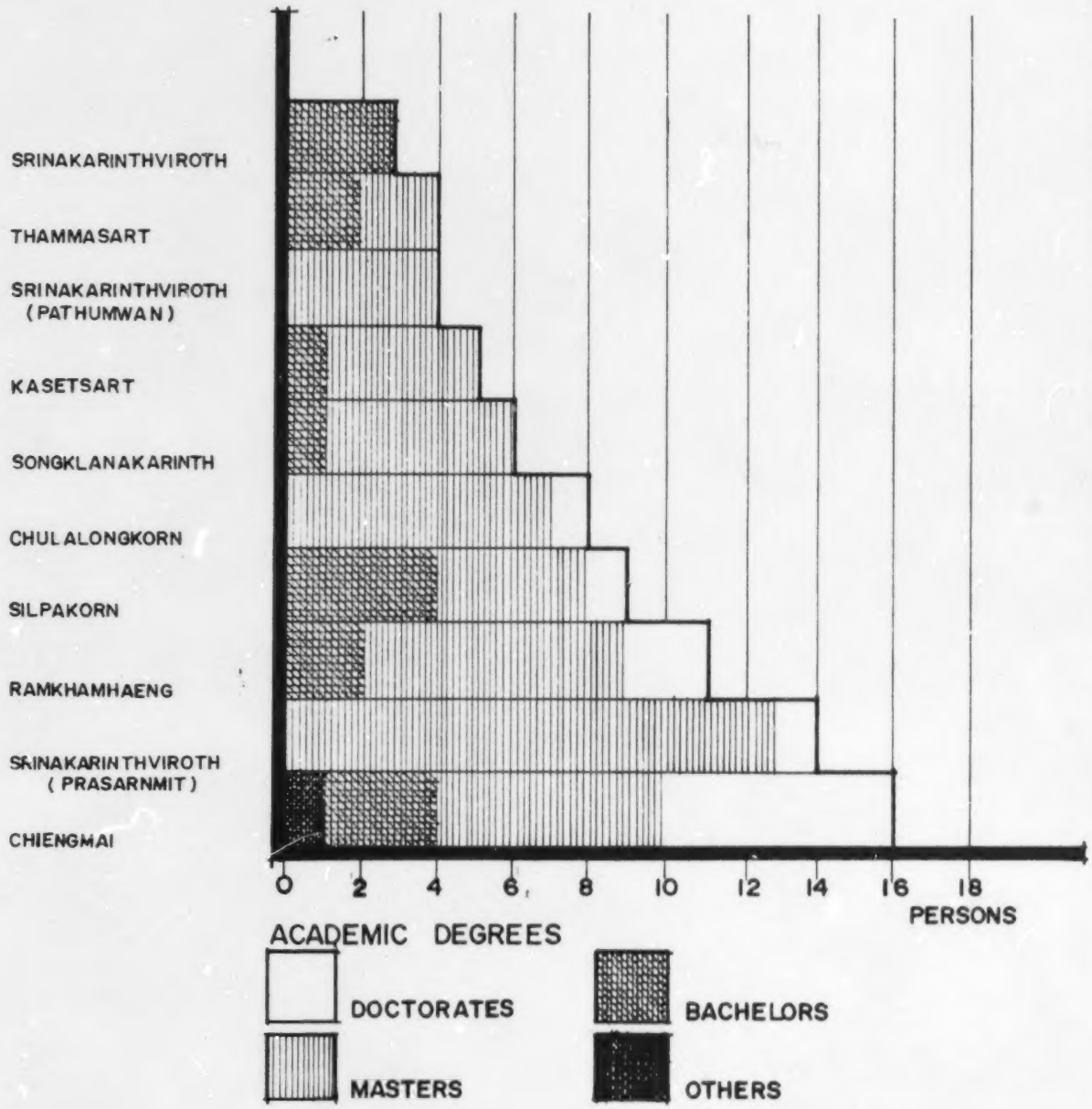

FIGURE 2 AREAS OF TEACHING INTERESTED (1980)

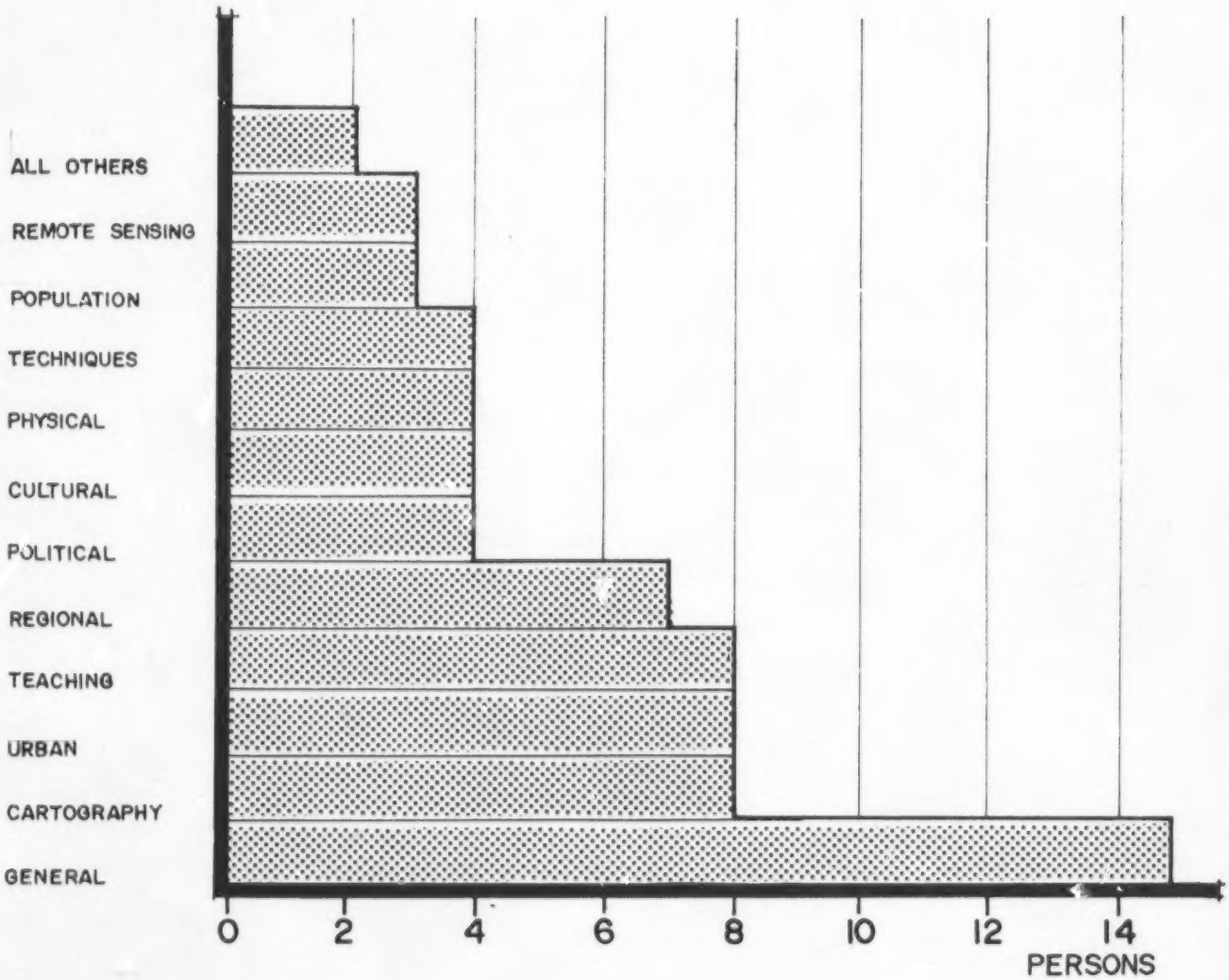

FIGURE 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF GEOGRAPHY PROGRAM AT SEVEN UNIVERSITIES (140 Semester hours avg)